

Reflection from the Superior General

This October, 2019, Pope Francis invites the whole Church to celebrate an Extraordinary Month of Mission. It is an opportunity for each Marist and each community to reflect on our understanding of Marist mission and to re-commit ourselves to "the Work of Mary".

"In this Extraordinary Missionary Month, let us pray that the Holy Spirit may engender a new missionary "spring" for all those baptized and sent by Christ's Church," says the Holy Father.

Last week here in Villa Santa Maria we were delighted to welcome many Bishops from Oceania during their *ad limina* visit to Rome. Their visit reminded us the priority of Oceania in the mission of the Society from the very earliest days. Fr Jean-Claude could indeed be called "the father of the Church in Oceania".



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The presence of the Bishops also helps us reflect on how much our missionary understanding has changed since 1836 when we Marists were first commissioned with the evangelization of "Western Oceania". Since then, the colonial age has largely gone. Understanding of the theology of "salvation" has broadened. We have come to believe that "mission" is more an attitude of heart than a long-distance trip. We have come to depth the truth that everyone is called to mission as much by Baptism as by Religious Profession or Ordination. We have deepened our consideration of those aspects of Trinitarian theology that reflect on "mission" as one way of understanding the very nature of God, the Incarnation and the Church.

We will gather as Marist leaders this month for the annual ARC meeting. This will be a time of discerning together our call "to be truly missionary" (#12). In Mexico this month our confreres are gathering in a Special Assembly to review our mission there.

The front line of mission has always been, since Gospel times, bringing the Good News of salvation to our sister or brother beside us who is struggling in some way. The 2017 Chapter asks us especially to focus on "the poor, the youth and the migrant". (#19) Many Marists work on this front line of mission, sometimes at great cost to themselves. We remember especially our confreres in the diocese of Bamenda, Cameroon, continuing to serve the people with dangerous civil unrest swirling about them.

Another aspect of mission is asking the difficult questions about *why* so many people are suffering and oppressed. We can be involved with local efforts to work for Gospel-justice in at least one important area such as ecology, migration, economic inequality, or rights for minority groups, to name a few. While we labour locally all these issues will also be considered more universally in the Synod on the Amazon later this month here in Rome.

We work with so many others to "bring Good News to the poor". Hopefully we are exploring new and creative ways of working even more effectively alongside Lay Marist missionaries.

October opens with the Feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux, who may seem an odd choice to be "patron of the missions". As a young Marist in a remote region of New Caledonia I was surprised to see her statue at the very front and centre of a Kanak home. What was a young, enclosed Carmelite nun from another culture and era doing there? Therese of Lisieux reminds us that prayer, especially contemplative prayer, is the nourishment for mission - "love in the heart of the Church". All of us as Marists, no matter where we find ourselves along our life's journey, are called to profound prayer that bears fruit in the Work of Mary".

Mary, Queen of the Apostles, pray for all of us called to be missionaries bearing your Name.

John Larsen s.m.